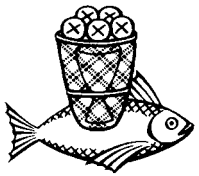
Living with Christ

Great Lent at Home

O LORD and Master of my life, grant that I may not be afflicted with a spirit of sloth, inquisitiveness, ambition and vain talking. Instead, bestow upon me, Your servant, a spirit of purity, humility, patience and love. Yes, O Lord and King, grant me the grace to see my own sins and not to judge my brethren. For you are blessed forever and ever. Amen.

Melkite Greek-Catholic Eparchy of Newton
Office of Educational Services



Introduction

Children need frequent reinforcement of any action or idea we wish to convey. To help our children grasp the concept of the Great Fast and make it their own, we have designed the following daily program providing concepts and activities for each day of the Fast, for Holy Week and for Bright Week.

It is suggested that you print each daily selection and discuss it. Family meal times are considered the most accessible time for such discussions. At your evening meal present and discuss the selection for the next day.

Display the completed pages on a bulletin board or bind together as a booklet for occasional review.

First Monday

Today we begin the Great Fast. Our Church has four Fasts every year. The one before Holy Week and Pascha is called "Great" because it is the longest and the most important of them all.

The Great Fast lasts for 40 days, reminding us that the Lord Jesus fasted for 40 days after His baptism in the Jordan (read Luke 4:2). Another holy person who fasted for forty days is Moses, when he received the Ten Commandments (read Exodus 34:28).

Many times during the year we forget God and other people. We think about ourselves and what we want. During the Great Fast we try to change by thinking more about God and others. The Great Fast is a time for changing things like how we spend our time, or how we spend our money. Changing these things reminds us to change how we think and feel about God and others.

We start the Great Fast by **asking God and others to forgive us** if we have hurt them in any way. Asking forgiveness is like cleaning off the table before we put our food on it. We clean off the old before we begin the new. Asking forgiveness is the first change we make during the Fast.

- The time before Pascha (Easter) is called the ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Fast.
- There are __ __ __ weeks in the Great Fast leading up to Palm Sunday.
- Make a list of those people whom you may have hurt. Then ask them to forgive you so you start the Great Fast with a clean heart.
- Memorize this prayer for the first week of the Fast: "***Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.***"

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Tuesday

The Great Fast is a time for change. We try to spend more time focused on how to please God and others. When things take us away from God, we can sin. We need to confess our sins to God and change the things that lead us to sin. This is called "repentance."

In the Liturgy we pray "that the rest of our lives may be spent in peace and repentance." We do that by learning more about the ways of God and then putting them into practice in our lives. When we think about God's Commandments we are on the first step to repentance.

When we were baptized the priest asked us to renounce Satan and his sinful ways. We promised to serve Christ the Son of God in faith and in truth. When we forget these promises, we sin. But the Lord never forgets His promise to us: "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

If we have fallen into sin we can repent and God will raise us up because He is always with us.

- In the Ten Commandments which God gave through Moses the first three concern life with God. Find them in your Bible or prayerbook.
- Do you honor God by praying to Him every day? By not using His name as a swear word? By sharing in the Liturgy every Sunday?
- The rest of the Commandments teach us to respect others. What are these Commandments?
- How do you treat your parents? Are you violent with others? Do you take what belongs to others? Do you envy them for what they have?
- In the New Commandment which God gave through Christ we are called to love one another as God loves us. What do you do to show that you love God? That you love others?
- Prepare to go to Confession by loving God and others more during the Great Fast.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Wednesday

What do people do on their day off? Most people take it easy. They forget about their job or their studies and spend the time doing things they enjoy. Too often they neglect to pray as well.

God gives us our days off as well as our work days and we must thank Him for both. Every day believers turn to God in the morning and again throughout the day. Christians also pray while they are doing other things like driving, riding the bus or taking a walk. In fact, we can pray in all circumstances. **The Jesus Prayer** can help us do this. We can say it aloud or under our breath or silently wherever we are.

In the Jesus Prayer we recognize (*a*) that Christ is our Lord and (*b*) that we are sinners in need of His mercy. We repeat the Jesus Prayer over and over. You may have seen people using a prayer-rope to keep count of the number of prayers they have said. If we say this prayer often enough, it enters into our mind and heart and becomes part of us.

St Paul wrote in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians 5:16-18, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" The Lord wants us to pray as much as we can, and the Great Fast is the perfect time for praying more than usual. And the Jesus Prayer is a great way to do it.

- In the Jesus Prayer I confess that Jesus is ___ ___ ___ ___ and the ___ ___ ___ of God.
- I also admit that I am a ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___.
- Memorize the Jesus Prayer: "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner**."
- Say the Prayer slowly ten times. Do this in the morning, before lunch and when you get in bed.
- With your pastor's help, locate and learn how to use a prayer-rope for saying the Jesus Prayer.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Thursday

The Great Fast is a time to think more about God and what He has done for us. It is also a time to think more about other people.

The Lord Jesus said that the most important commandment was that we love God. Then He said that "the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

The first Christians knew that you can't love God if you don't love others. They believed that "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

God gives us many places to show our love for others. The first place is our own home: parents, brothers and sisters and other family members who live with us. Our family includes others: grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins. We may not even have met all of them.

Other places where we are called to love others include our neighborhood, our church family and our work- or schoolmates. God has placed these people in our lives and calls us to love them. The Great Fast gives us the chance to practice our love for them.

- Think of something special you can do for each person in your household today. Make it a surprise.
- Buy or make a card for a family member who lives in another city. Sign it "I love you" or "I miss you."
- Visit an elderly or shut-in neighbor. Help with a needed chore around the house or go shopping for them.
- Bring coffee, juice or a Lenten snack to share at church.
- Take as many photos of people at church on Sunday as you can. E-mail them to a parishioner who has moved away (e.g. in the armed forces).

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Friday

Do you have a favorite movie or TV show? Some people like comedies, others prefer thrillers, musicals or documentaries. Some of them are just entertaining, but others can teach us a lot.

The stories of the saints tell us about the heroes and heroines of our Church. Some of them lived in the first century while others are from our own day. Some were tortured and killed because of their faith in Christ; they are the **martyrs**. Others were imprisoned but lived to tell about their trials; they are the **confessors**. The **passion bearers** suffered and died rather than repay violence with more violence.

Our Church also honors saints who gave up their lived in other ways, devoting themselves to caring for the sick, especially the sick poor: people like St Basil who built hospices for them or like St Nicholas who helped them secretly. We remember holy women like St Martha who raised money to care for the needy and St Elizabeth who founded a convent to nurse the sick.

During the Great Fast spend some time learning about the great saints of our Church, especially your patron (the saint whose name you bear) and the patron saint of your parish church. Their stories are found in many books and articles, both in print and on line; some of their stories have been made into films. Think about the qualities that made them into saints.

- Have each family member research one or two saints and share their findings with the family. Include your parish patron and your own patron saints.
- Take a walk through your parish church and stop in front of each icon. Make a list of the saints honored there and find out how they lived and died.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Saturday

Today we remember a miracle performed by St Theodore the Recruit in the fourth century. This saint had been a Roman soldier in a town near the Black Sea. Commanded to sacrifice to the Roman gods, he refused and was burned at the stake in about the year 306. He stood firm and would not dent his faith.

Fifty years after his death this is what happened. The Christians in Constantinople had been fasting strictly during the first week of the Great Fast. Now it was Saturday – time to stop fasting and eat something. The emperor commanded that all the food in the marketplace by sprinkled with blood offered to idols. St Theodore appeared to the bishop and told him to warn the Christians not to eat anything there but instead to eat cooked wheat and honey, called **kolyva**. They stood firm and would not eat pagan sacrifices.

Soon after the Church began the custom of making and blessing kolyva on this Saturday to remember what St Theodore had done and how the Christians would not eat anything offered to idols. Whenever fasting makes you hungry remember how those Christians, as hungry as they were, refused to eat anything offered to pagan gods. Stand firm and keep the Fast.

- Attend the Liturgy today and eat some of the blessed kolyva in memory of this miracle.
- Make your own kolyva from the recipe in *Guide for the Domestic Church*.
- Instead of having lunch, eat the modern equivalent of kolyva, Granola bars, in memory of those early Christians.
- Review all the activity cards from the first week of the Great Fast and do any activities you missed during the week.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

First Sunday

Today our Church celebrates another important time in its history. In the eighth and ninth centuries there were some Christians who did not think that it was right to venerate icons. For over 100 years they persecuted Christians who did so. Finally, in 843, icons were restored in our churches once and for all by the Empress

Icons point to the ones they depict: Christ, His Mother or the saints. They remind us that the Son of God truly became human and that the Holy Spirit truly dwells in the saints. In them we can see and touch how real is God's love for us. When we kiss them we are honoring the ones shown in the icons.

The center of an Eastern Christian home is its icon corner where people can pray together. Icon corners may have icons of Christ, His Mother and the patron saints of family members. Some people light lamps there when they are praying. Others keep a lamp burning in their icon corner all the time, reminding us that we are part of the Body of Christ all the time.

- Our churches have special services and an icon procession on this day. Bring your favorite icon to church today to be part of it.
- Put some flowers in your icon corner to remember that icons were restored in our Church on this day.
- Parish bulletins often have icons on the cover. What icon is on today's bulletin? What can you learn about it?

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

Second Monday

Today we start the second week of the Great Fast, the time of changing our ways (repentance). One of the areas of our life we are called to examine is prayer. How often do we pray? What is our prayer like? How comfortable are we at the thought of praying?

Some people say that they don't pray because it's too hard. Other people might wonder at that – after all, we know the Lord's Prayer by heart. What's so hard about saying it? But sincere people want their prayer to be more than repetition. The problem is that they don't know what to say to God.

For prayer to satisfy our hearts it should consist of (a) **adoration**, (b) **contrition**, (c) **thanksgiving** and (d) **supplication**. We begin with adoration or worship: praising God for who He truly is – our Creator, our Savior, the Source and Sustainer of our life. In contrition we express sorrow for our sins and failings which distance us from God. In prayers of thanksgiving we express our gratitude to God for everything He has given us. Finally in supplication we ask God for blessings for ourselves, our loved ones and for the whole world.

The Church's formal prayers give us models of these styles of prayer. The Prayer of St Joannikios, said nightly in the service of Compline, is a good example of prayer as adoration: **The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!** It is an ideal prayer for ending each day.

- The word "ACTS" helps us remember the four styles of prayer. When we worship God, praising Him for His holiness and majesty it is called A ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___. Make a list of things you praise God for.
- For what sins or transgressions do you need to ask God's forgiveness (C___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___)?

Second Tuesday

The Great Fast is a time to pray; it is also a time to fast. In our Church fasting involves two things. First, we don't eat or drink anything for part of each day (usually from midnight until noon). Secondly, when we do eat, we avoid flesh (meat, fish) and dairy products. We eat like Adam and Eve in Paradise as a way of saying that Paradise is where we want to be.

In the Bible we read, "*Out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. … Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat…*'" (Genesis 2:15-17). The "food of Paradise," then, is the produce of the land: vegetables, grains, fruits and nuts.

It was only much later, after the great flood, that God allowed other foods. He tells Noah, "*Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs*" (Genesis 9:3). When we fast from such foods we are saying that during the Fast we want to go back to the very beginning, when God and humanity were in perfect communion, before sin separated us from God.

- Popular food made from grains includes pasta and rice. What other food made from grain is found at almost every meal?
- Make a list of your favorite vegetable dishes and include them in your Lenten meals.
- In our Church grains, vegetables, fruits and nuts are often called "the food of P___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___".

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Second Wednesday

The Great Fast is a time for more intense prayer and fasting. It is also a time for increasing our participation in liturgical services. Our worship, always rich and varied, is deepened by Lenten prayers and chants. Make a point to attend Lenten services as much as possible.

Some people question the need to come to church when they can pray at home. When we take part in a service two things happen which don't take place when we pray alone. In church we pray **as a community**, expressing our unity in the Body of Christ. Secondly, when we pray privately we express our personal concerns. When we pray in church we take part in the services developed over 2000 years. From the prayers, hymns and readings **we learn the Church's teachings** about the saving mystery of God's plan for us. If we only pray alone we may be hearing just our own voice.

The main evening services of our Church during the Fast are Vespers, Great Compline and the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Vespers is the Church's ordinary evening service augmented by readings from the Old Testament (Genesis and Proverbs), Lenten prayers and chants such as this: "Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, that we may pass through the Great Fast as through a great sea, and reach the goal of the third-day Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord."

- The Old Testament readings are listed on our Church's wall calendar. Read one at every meal during the Fast.
- Consult your parish bulletin or web site for your parish Lenten schedule. Plan to attend the Lenten services being offered.
- When there is no evening service in your parish, read Vespers as a family from *A Book of the Hours* published by our eparchy.

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Second Thursday

During the Great Fast we increase our prayer, worship, and fasting. We also are called to make sharing more a part of our lives. In the Bible "**almsgiving"** is the word used for sharing our material goods.

Some people have great wealth; most do not, but everyone has something to share because that is God's plan for us. St Paul teaches us, "*God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work*" (2 Corinthians 9:8). God's plan is that we have enough ("sufficiency") to meet our needs and more than enough ("an abundance") for sharing with others.

Sometimes we confuse "Needs" and "Wants." Because we *want* something, this doesn't mean that we *need* it. And because we *can* afford it, that doesn't necessarily mean we *should* buy it. If we devote our abundance to satisfying our own wants, then we are frustrating God's plan for us. We are robbing God.

One way of sharing during the Great Fast is through the eparchy's **Shepherd's Care** program. Obtain one or more offering boxes from your local parish. Encourage each other to put your spare change in the offering box at the end of each day as a way of showing solidarity with the poor during this holy season.

- In past years funds given to Shepherd's Care have gone to help orphans, the hungry, the homeless, drug abusers, the destitute, runaway teens, victims of war, disease and disasters such as Hurricane Sandy. Read the Shepherd's Care brochure to learn where this year's offerings will go.
- Put an offering box in each bedroom and begin to fill them.

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Second Friday

The Great Fast provides us with several ways to encounter Christ: through deeper prayer and worship, through increased fasting and almsgiving. It is also the perfect time for encountering the living Word of God in the pages of the written word of God, the Bible. Replace some TV or entertainment time with reading the Holy Scriptures.

We regularly hear readings from the Bible at the Liturgy, but may not know how to explore these writings on our own. The first step is to become familiar with the table of contents. Learn which books make up the Old Testament and which are in the New. The Old Testament includes the Law, the Prophets and the other Writings. In the New Testament we find the four Gospels, the Apostolic Writings (Acts and the Epistles) and the Book of Revelation.

If you have never read any of these books from beginning to end, start with one of the Gospels. Do this as a family. If you are familiar with the New Testament begin exploring the Old. In our daily Lenten services we read from the Law (Genesis), the Prophets (Isaiah) and the other Writings (Proverbs). Read a chapter of one of these books daily. If what you read puzzles you, discuss it with your parish priest after Lenten services.

- List the three basic parts of the Old Testament. Read Luke 24:44 to see what the Lord explained about the Old Testament.
- What New Testament books do we read at the Divine Liturgy?
- From which Old Testament book do we also read at the Liturgy?

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Second Saturday

Saturday is the day on which the body of Christ lay in the tomb. For this reason our Church regularly devotes Saturdays to praying for the dead. Thus in one of today's chants we pray, "Sleeping in the tomb, You have transformed the sorrow of death into a sleep, and have given life to the departed. O Savior, grant to those who have gone from us a place with Your elect, through the prayers of Your martyrs."

What do we ask from God for our departed? There are two brief prayers we repeat again and again when we pray for them. The first prayer is, "Within Your peace grant rest, O Lord, to the souls of Your servants." This "rest" means that they be delivered from all pain, grief or sorrow –all the uncertainties of this life.

The second prayer is: "May their memory be eternal." In other words, may God always remember them and grant to those for whom we pray the eternal life He has promised to those who love Him.

The fullness of eternal life will come at the final resurrection, as we say in the Creed. Then, as St Paul writes, "When this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

- Make a list of family members who have died and place it in your icon corner. Remember them in your prayers frequently, especially on Saturdays.
- Make kolyva or memorial bread for your breakfast on Lenten Saturdays.
- If loved ones are buried nearby, visit the cemetery and pray for their repose.

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Second Sunday

On Sundays in the Great Fast we honor saints who have a special meaning for us as we fast. Every Sunday we remember one in a special way: by praying the Liturgy called by his name: the Liturgy of St Basil the Great.

Born in Cappadocia (modern Turkey) in 330, St Basil came from a wealthy family and received the best education of his day. He could have become a revered scholar and professor, but chose to live the monastic life instead. At the age of 34 St Basil was ordained a priest and six years later he was chosen to be Archbishop of Caesarea. For the next nine years St Basil devoted himself to writing instructions for his people, to arranging the Liturgy, and to establishing orphanages, hospitals and homes for the elderly. He died on January 1, 379 and is revered as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs of the fourth century.

We serve the Liturgy of St Basil ten times each year, including every Sunday during the Great Fast. The people's parts are mostly the same as our ordinary Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. The priest's parts are quite different, giving us a thorough instruction in the mystery of salvation. In this prayer St Basil tells us what we should ask for in Holy Communion:

"Unite all of us, who share in this one bread and cup, with one another for communion in the one Holy Spirit, and to let none of us share in the holy body and blood of your Christ to judgment or condemnation; but that we may find mercy and grace with all the saints, who have been well-pleasing to you since time began."

- Review all the activity cards from the second week of the Great Fast and do any activities you missed during the week.

The Father is my hope, the Son my refuge, the Holy Spirit my protection: O All-Holy Trinity, glory to You!

Third Monday

When people in the Byzantine Churches think of the Great Fast, there is one prayer that comes to mind: the Prayer of St Ephrem the Syrian, the fourth-century Christian poet. This prayer is part of every weekday service during the Fast as well as people's individual prayers at home. It expresses our goals for the Fast as no other prayer does.

In this prayer we ask to be delivered from behaviors destructive of Christian growth: spiritual laziness ("sloth") and busy distractions ("inquisitiveness… vain talking"). With sloth we give up caring about the spiritual life; or we may replace spiritual activity with business, nosiness or gossip.

Then we ask for the positive qualities of reverence and respect for others ("purity, humility, patience and love") that help our spiritual journey. Most especially we pray for the wisdom to know our own weaknesses and not judge others.

This prayer is regularly offered with a full prostration to the ground after each line. To do this (a) make the sign of the cross, (b) kneel on both knees, (c) touch your forehead to the ground, then (d) stand up.

- Learn the Prayer of St Ephrem (found on the Lenten prayer card at the Introduction to this program). Review and discuss the qualities mentioned in the Prayer.
- Practice making prostrations. Doing so at home will make it easier to do so at church.
- Add the Prayer of St Ephrem to your family prayers during the Fast.

O Lord and Master of my life, grant that I not be infected with a spirit of sloth, inquisitiveness, ambition and vain talking.

IC XC
NI KA

Third Tuesday

The Lord's baptism in the Jordan River marks the beginning of His public ministry to the people of His day. Before He approached people, however, He approached His Father in prayer and fasting. The Gospel tells us that "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry" (Luke 4:1, 2).

The Lord Jesus faced three temptations while He fasted. The first temptation was to give up His fast by turning stones into bread. He resisted: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (v. 3). Then the devil tried to lure Him to idolatry with the promise of great power. Again He resisted: "It is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (v. 8). Finally He was tempted to make a show of His power for His own sake. This too He rejected.

When we fast we too are tempted about food (to eat meat or to eat more) and about "other gods" (TV, work, etc.). We are tempted to make a show of our fasting to appear more "spiritual" than others. Recognizing and combatting these temptations is an important part of our Lenten efforts.

- Discuss what temptations concerning food or distractions do you have to oppose during the Fast.
- What do you do when you are tempted to make a show of your fasting or other Lenten activities?

Instead, bestow upon me, Your servant, a spirit of purity, humility, patience and love.

IC XC
NI KA

Third Wednesday

During the Fast our Church has a distinctive Lenten weekday service, the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Our usual Divine Liturgy is a joyful celebration of the work of Christ for us; to serve it on fast days would drastically change the character of the season. Yet, Holy Communion is an important help to believers seeking to observe the Fast. In the Presanctified Liturgy we can receive Communion while maintaining the penitential spirit of the season.

The Eucharist we receive is "pre-sanctified," consecrated at a Divine Liturgy on the previous Sunday. The consecrated Lamb, sprinkled with some of the Precious Blood, is preserved on a diskos until the Liturgy. Usually it is immersed in a chalice of ordinary wine during the service to soften it.

The Presanctified Liturgy is always served in conjunction with vespers, at the end of the fasting day. The vestments worn are always dark in color. The first part of the service is vespers. After the two Old Testament readings, there is a solemn offering of incense as we sing "Let my prayer rise like incense before You; the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice." The Prayer of St Ephrem the Syrian and the usual litanies conclude this part of the service.

- Psalms are an important part of the Presanctified Liturgy. Read the introduction to the psalms in your Bible and write down three important ideas it contains.
- After the first Old Testament reading the priest blesses everyone with a candle saying, "The Light of Christ enlightens all mankind." Read Matthew 17:1-2, Luke 2:29-32, John 8:12 and John 12:46 to see what the Gospels say about the light of Christ.

Yes, O Lord and King, bestow upon me the grace to see my own sins and not to judge my brethren.

IC XC
NI KA

Third Thursday

Sharing (almsgiving) is one of the principal forms of Lenten activity in our tradition. These were pillars of piety in the Judaism of Christ's day and they remain so for us today. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord instructs His disciples how to act "When you fast… when you pray… when you give alms…" (Matthew 6:1-18).

When we think of almsgiving we generally think of the following three forms. We are called to share our time, our talents, and our treasure. By treasure we mean all the material resources which we have been given by the mercy of God: money, to be sure, but also food, clothing, furnishings, housewares, etc. Most people regularly replace such items in their own homes; God's people see that their serviceable discards are put to good use for others.

Every community provides opportunities for donating material resources to a number of sources: food banks, homeless shelters, family services. Many parishes collect these items regularly and channel them to local agencies or individual recipients. In some communities members are asked to put aside a portion of the meals they prepare for their own families and put them in the church's freezer for distribution to those in need. There are a number of similar small ways to give of our treasures for the good of others.

- Go through your closets, garage, or attic for items that no longer interest you and deliver them to your parish or community collection centers.
- Check on your Shepherd's Care box(es). Contribute to them regularly.

O Lord and Master of my life, grant that I not be infected with a spirit of sloth, inquisitiveness, ambition and vain talking.

IC XC
NI KA

Third Friday

Jesus' public ministry began at the shore of the Sea of Galilee when He began gathering people to follow Him, starting with a few fishermen. Later He formed an inner circle of twelve disciples. Afterwards that circle was enlarged to number seventy whom He sent out to take His message to the nearby villages. By the time of His resurrection there were 120 close followers who had gathered in Jerusalem and who would receive the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 4:18-22 we read that the first four disciples whom the Lord called were fishermen. Matthew does not tell us why they would follow Him. In Luke 5:1-11 we read what so impressed them that they left their work to go with Jesus. They were His first and closest disciples.

The Lord gives each of His followers in every age a particular calling. Some are called to care for the sick or the elderly. Others are called to serve the Church in ministry. Parents are called to serve their children by bringing them up "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). What other examples of vocation ("calling") can you mention?

- Locate the Gospels in your Bible and read the selections from Matthew and Luke cited above.
- Retell the story of the miraculous catch of fish using the words *nets, catch, water, fish, break, boats, full* and *sink*.
- Read Luke 6:12-16 to find the names of the Twelve. Learn them by heart.

Instead, bestow upon me, Your servant, a spirit of purity, humility, patience and love.

Third Saturday

We've completed another week of the Fast and have another weekend "break." As we know, in our Church we devote many Saturdays to prayer for the dead. This is especially appropriate as it was a Saturday, the "Great Sabbath," on which Christ lay in the tomb.

Last Saturday we prayed for our departed family members. As Christians we also have spiritual ancestors whom we should remember: our godparents and sponsors in the faith, the priest who baptized us, and those teachers and mentors who gave us spiritual life. Through the holy mysteries and through the advice and example they gave they brought us to Christ.

One way in which we remember those who have gone before is by offering candles in their memory; another is by burning incense. These rites recall the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt. They were accompanied by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night, signs of God's providential care. Our candle/pillar of fire and the cloud/incense represent our faith that the departed loved ones are in God's care and will reach their eternal homeland in His love.

- Make a list of your departed godparents, sponsors, pastors and teachers and place it in your icon corner. Remember them in your prayers.
- Light a candle for your departed loved ones every Saturday and place it in your icon corner.
- Share family stories about these people who gave you spiritual life.

Yes, O Lord and King, bestow upon me the grace to see my own sins and not to judge my brethren.

Third Sunday

Today is "Shot in the Arm Sunday" – a day on which the Church encourages us to keep up our practice of the Fast by displaying the precious cross. We look at the cross and remember what the Fast is all about: God's gift of Himself for us.

We do not focus on Christ's sufferings today as we do in Holy Week. Instead we look at the effect of His saving death. Every day this week the Church prays the following: "The angel's fiery sword will no longer guard the gate of Paradise for the cross of the Lord has put it out wondrously. The power of Death has been broken, the victory of Hades wiped out and You, my Savior, have stood up and called out to all those bound in hell: 'Come now; enter into Paradise.'"

We express our faith in the joyful victory of Christ over Death by surrounding the cross with flowers. In many churches people take one of these flowers home and put it in their icon corner as a reminder of Christ's triumph. We are no longer captive to the power of Death which has been defeated by the cross.

- If you have a cross at home, decorate it with flowers today.
- Take a cross to church and participate in the procession and veneration of the cross.
- In the hymn above we hear: "The angel's fiery sword will no longer guard the gate of Paradise." To what does this refer? Read Genesis 3:24 to find out. Then read all of Genesis chapter 3 to learn more.

We bow in worship before Your cross, O Master, and we give praise to Your holy resurrection.

Fourth Monday

We all like some physical expression of our inner feelings. In our personal lives we exchange flowers or jewelry; in our public life we fly the flag on civil holidays, decorate pumpkins in the fall or display harvest fruits on Thanksgiving. Even non-Christians decorate Christmas trees as signs of mid-winter cheer.

Like the Jews when the Temple was still standing, both Eastern and Western Churches offer incense in their services as an expression of their prayer. Psalm 140 gives us the meaning: "Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice" (v.2). As the smoke of the burning incense goes up in the air, may our prayers go to God and be accepted.

Eastern Christians also burn incense at home in small hand censers. Some people do so every Sunday or feast day, taking the censer from room to room, sanctifying the entire house.

The Presanctified Liturgy during the Great Fast contains a solemn incensation of the holy place while Psalm 140:2 is sung. Burn incense in your icon corner chanting this verse as part of your family Lenten evening prayer time (see Lenten prayer page).

- Hand censers, charcoal (not the kind for barbecues) and incense are often available from your church book shop, a Greek or Middle Eastern grocer or a smoke shop. Make a family project out of locating your nearest source and obtaining these items for your home use. Use a small salver or saucer if a censer is unavailable.
- Learn to chant Psalm 140:2 as sung in your parish.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Tuesday

As we continue to observe the Great Fast we draw strength from our spiritual ancestors who were known for their fasting. In the time before Christ three Old Testament figures come to mind. We see how they fasted and in what their fasts resulted.

In the Bible we read that Moses "… was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai… the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Exodus 34:28-29).

When Elijah had destroyed the power of the idol-worshipping priests of Baal he fled from the forces of the queen Jezebel who had protected them. During his flight Elijah fasted for forty days and forty nights journeying to Mount Horeb. There he was rewarded by experiencing the presence of God and receiving directions from Him (see 1 Kings 19).

Just before we read the story of Christ's ministry in the Gospel we learn about the preaching of St John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness, eating only "locusts and wild honey" (Mt 3:4), the simplest foods found in nature. The Lord said that John was the greatest of the prophets.

- Fasting was one of the difficult choices these prophets made following God. Talk about other difficult choices people have made for God.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Wednesday

Have you attended the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts during this Fast? Then you noticed how the first half of this service is a Lenten vespers. The second half is a Communion service modeled in part on the Divine Liturgy… with one essential difference.

After the usual litanies there is a Great Entrance. In this Entrance there are no gifts of bread and wine carried to the holy table. Instead it is the Gifts sanctified last Sunday which are carried and we sing: "Behold, the completed mystical sacrifice in procession!" People bow and prostrate before the Eucharist as the procession enters the holy place.

The service continues with the litany before the Lord's Prayer. The entire heart of the Divine Liturgy is skipped – the Creed, the anaphora, the offering and consecration of the Gifts – because the Gifts we receive at this service are "pre-sanctified." The rest of the service follows much of the usual form of the Liturgy.

When we find ourselves tired by Lenten fasting we should remember that Christ is there in the Presanctified Gifts to refresh us spiritually and renew our commitment to Him through the Great Fast.

- Many parishes hold Lenten suppers following the Presanctified Liturgy. Attend as a family and help out however you can.
- If there is no parish supper, invite another family to join you for a Lenten meal after the service. Interest others in organizing parish suppers for next year's Great Fast.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Thursday

During the Great Fast we are called to increased sharing of what we have received. For many people, especially in families, their most jealously guarded treasure is time. People use precooked eggs and bacon or precut salad greens to save a few moments. Our almsgiving should certainly include giving of this precious treasure.

Much of our time is spent at (or preparing for) work or school. We spend some time on Church, family and social responsibilities. But we also "kill time" on TV, games or hobbies. Can some of that time be given to God?

Reflect on how much time each day is given to the various aspects of your life. Then focus on how much time is given to recreation: sports, movies, etc. Finally determine how much time is given to God and others.

Each person's state in life determines how much spare time is at their disposal. Students and retired people, for example, probably have more free time than working parents, so each person's answer will be different. In any case, each person's gift of time is unique – because you are the only one who can give it.

We frequently put off giving of our time to God and others, assuming that we'll get around to it. But none of us knows exactly how much time God has actually given to us. Use today for Him – we may not have a tomorrow.

- Make a 24-hour pie chart of your average day to determine where your time goes. See how much of your day can be available for God and others.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Friday

The Gospels tell us that signs and wonders were an important part of the Lord Jesus' work on earth. By doing things that people ordinarily could not do He led people to see Him as especially close to God. They came to see Him as more than a wise teacher. Some saw Him as a prophet; others came to believe that He was the Messiah.

In Mark 4:35-41 we read how the Lord calmed the troubled sea during a storm. The startled disciples, who had thought they were going to drown, began wondering, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Note that the Gospels or Matthew, Mark and Luke often tell the same story, sometimes with little differences. This means that such stories were cherished in many early Church communities as important details in their picture of Jesus. Read Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25 and compare their versions with Mark's.

- When people saw the great things that Jesus was doing they worshipped God who gave Him such power. Talk about some ways that we worship God and why.
- Not everyone thought Jesus was from God. Read Mt 12:24-28 to see what some Pharisees felt was the source of His power. How did Jesus react?
- In Church we pray that the Lord exercise His power over water today by transforming it, making it holy. Obtain holy water from church and drink it at your time of prayer.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Saturday

At every Divine Liturgy, vespers and other services we remember two groups of people to whom we are all indebted: the clergy of our Church and those who work in the service of our country: its public servants, its government and its armed forces. On Saturdays we have been praying for the dead; today let us remember our departed clergy and public servants.

Begin the list with our departed former hierarchs:

Bishop Justin Najmy (1966-1968)
Archbishop Joseph Tawil (1969-1989)
Bishop Ignatius Ghattas (1990-1992)

List any departed priests and deacons who had served at your parish or school.

List any parishioners who may have died in the service of our country.

Place this list in your icon corner.

Light a candle and offer this prayer for them:

O our Savior, the Giver of life, bring to their eternal rest our fathers and brethren whom You have taken from this passing world, for they lift up their voices, crying, "O Lord, glory to You!"

- Review all the activity cards from the fourth week of the Great Fast and do any activities you missed during the week.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fourth Sunday

In the Liturgy of St Basil, which we serve every Sunday in the Great Fast, most of the priest's prayers are longer than those in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. They also stress other aspects of the mystery of Christ on which we can reflect during the Fast.

"He brought us to the knowledge of You, the true God and Father, purchasing us to Himself as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (from the Anaphora). Here St Basil echoes the First Epistle of St Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people…" But then St Peter explains why we have been given that status: "… so that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." And so our calling as Christians is to be a people who proclaim God's praises.

At the Sunday Liturgy we enter Christ's presence and celebrate our union with God. All week long we have the chance to use His gifts. During the week we can praise God every day in our own personal prayers. We may have the chance to join the Church in its common praise of God (e.g. at vespers). Even when we cannot do so, we can offer the Church's praises as home because that is our calling as God's royal priesthood.

- Obtain copies of the *Horologion* or the abridged *Book of the Hours*, both published by our eparchy. Ask your priest or deacon to show you how to pray with the Church at home from one of these books.

Let my prayer rise like incense before You: the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

Fifth Monday

Since the Great Fast is a time for more intense prayer, it is a good time to reflect on one of our most frequently used prayers: the group we call the "Trisagion Prayers" (because they start with the Trisagion) or the "Beginning Prayers" (because they are used at the start of most services and even personal prayers).

The Trisagion Prayers express the four styles of prayer that sum up our relationship with God: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication. Adoration or worship is what we express in the first Beginning Prayer, the Trisagion itself.

This prayer is based on the vision seen by the prophet Isaiah: "Above [the ark] stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:2-3)

Holiness is that unique quality of God – His righteousness, almighty power and eternal life – to which adoration is the only fitting response. This is why each time we say this prayer we bow in adoration making a metany (touching the floor with our hand and making the sign of the cross). Saying the prayer three times recalls our faith that God is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Two other chants in the Divine Liturgy sing of God's holiness. What are they?
- The third of the Ten Commandments tells us "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Name some ways we can keep a day "holy."

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.

Fifth Tuesday

When we think of fasting, not eating or drinking generally comes to mind. Not eating one or another kind of food (or any food and drink) is not the only kind of fasting in our tradition. Many Eastern Christians abstain from marital relations on fast days. People also fast from favorite forms of entertainment as well.

It was once common in countries where most people were Christian to close all the theaters and places of amusement during the Fast. There would be no dances or musical entertainments except for religious music. They did not avoid these things because they were wrong, but because the Fast was meant for something better: deepening our relationship with God.

Our society has no such custom. Our country includes people of many religions and of none. Entertainment is at our fingertips twenty four hour each day. We have to choose deliberately if we want to fast from our ordinary amusements during the Great Fast.

Our society also provides us with a vast array of replacements for entertainment. Instead of reading novels or watching our favorite shows we can view religious programming on TV. We can listen to religious music instead of the top forty. We can replace our usual good amusements with something better because it deepens our relationship with God.

- Discuss your family's favorite entertainments. Decide from which of them you will fast and how often.
- Make a notice "No TV (video games, computer, etc.) today!" and display it prominently.

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.

Fifth Wednesday

During the Great Fast most parishes offer more than the usual opportunities to worship. One popular Lenten service is our Church is Great Compline. Compline is the regular end-of-day service; Great Compline has added psalms, prayers, and chants appropriate to the season.

One of these added elements is taken from the prophecy of Isaiah, chapters 8 and 9. Isaiah lived in Judea in the mid-eighth century BC, a time when Judea was threatened by lax religious practices and by Assyrian invaders. He foretold that a righteous king in David's line would arise and lead the holy remnant of God's people.

Isaiah's affirmation that God is with us is seen in the Church as pointing to the ultimate son of David, the Son of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Isaiah's prophecy becomes a hymn of triumph, glorifying Christ as the presence of God in our midst.

Isaiah's prophecy is cited in the Gospel of Matthew to show that the Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin, is the promised King and Savior of His people, the Prince of Peace.

- Read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:22-23 to see how the Old Testament is shown to be fulfilled in the New.
- Did Matthew think up this connection himself? Read Luke 4:16-22 and Luke 24:13-27 to find the source of our belief that Christ fulfills the Old Testament prophecies.

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.

Fifth Thursday

In the Great Fast we are called to increased almsgiving. Many people think of almsgiving in terms of material goods exclusively, but we have seen that time is also something given us to share. Other non-material resources we have been given are our talents.

Each of us has a wide range of talents which we employ in our work, our family life, and our recreational pursuits. "But," as St Paul reminds us, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Our talents are not given to us merely to bolster our egos; they are meant to be employed for our community.

Some community groups focus on particular talents such as teaching or coaching. Others serve specific age groups (teens, seniors, etc.). Some hospitals and schools welcome volunteers to assist with specific tasks. If you have abilities like these, know they are given to be shared.

The local parish may be thought of as our spiritual "home away from home." All of the talents we exercise at our own home can be employed at church. Too often parishioners see themselves as consumers rather than providers. They expect the clergy or a few dedicated volunteers to cater to them as the church's "customers." Our vision is rather that expressed in the Scriptures, "Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

- Brainstorm a list of talents given to each family member. Include domestic, business, academic and recreational abilities.
- Explore your church and community programs and offer your services where needed.

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.

Fifth Friday

The Gospels show us Jesus working wonders like calming a stormy sea or multiplying bread and fish. They also show us Jesus healing the sick and raising the dead – things that cannot be called magic tricks. They showed the power of God working in Him.

But the Lord worked to heal the spirits as well as the bodies of those who came to Him. In Luke 5:17-26 we read about a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus. At first the Lord did not heal his body but dealt with his spirit, saying "your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 5:20).

The Pharisees objected, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But the Lord replied, "'Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Rise up and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' He said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house'" (Luke 5: 21-25).

The Lord Jesus offers forgiveness to us today in the Church. In the holy mysteries of Confession and Communion He forgives us as He forgave the paralyzed man and others He met during His time on earth because "the Son of man has the power on earth to forgive sins."

- We sin when we go against God's Commandments. Read Matthew 22:36-40 to see which commandments are the most important.
- We do not love God when we put our feelings first. Read Ephesians 4:21-32 and see what actions St Paul thinks are unworthy of Christians.
- Learn when you can go to Confession at your parish church and make plans to do so.

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.

Fifth Saturday

We begin our weekend "break" from the Fast by honoring the Theotokos. On March 25 we celebrate the Great Feast of the Annunciation to the Theotokos, remembering how she conceived Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since the Annunciation almost always falls during the Fast, it does not have a lengthy after-feast like all the other Great Feasts. We make up for it by celebrating in advance on Lenten weekends.

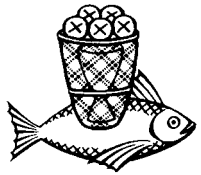
The Gospel of Luke describes the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel, sent by God, tells Mary she will have a child then explains how this will happen: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

We celebrate the Annunciation, Mary's giving birth and her intercession for the world by praying the Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos at Compline on Fridays. We join the priest and chanter in singing the refrain, "Hail, O Bride without a Bridegroom" (sometimes translated "Bride and Virgin" or "Bride ever-pure").

Thus we confess that Mary remained a virgin while giving birth to the Lord and after. The Church believes that she did not have marital relations with her spouse, St Joseph, and thus was "without a Bridegroom" even though she was married.

- Read the Gospel story of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38). What popular prayer is taken in part from this passage?
- Offer flowers to adorn the icon of the Theotokos for you parish celebration of the Akathist.

Hail, O Bride without a Bridegroom!



Fifth Sunday

On the last two Sundays of the Fast our Church remembers two ascetic saints, John Climacos and Mary of Egypt. We remember John for writing *The Ladder*, a book on the stages of the ascetic life and Mary for abandoning her godless way of life to live as a desert solitary. They surely speak to monastics; what do they mean to people in the world?

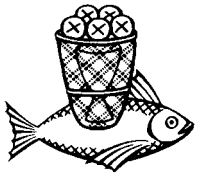
Monastics and people in the world live out the same elements of Christian life, but in different degrees. Both are called to pray and fast, to work and share the fruit of their labors, and to love those God has placed in their lives. An ascetic in the monastery or in the world is one who puts in practice the Gospel life, striving to maintain communion with God while dealing with the people and circumstances of life.

The heart of any Christian life is striving to do God's will. This is why St John Climacos' words to monks apply to all Christians: "In all your undertakings and in every way of life, whether you are living in obedience, or are not submitting your work to anyone, whether in outward or in spiritual matters, let it be your rule and practice to ask yourself: Am I really doing this in accordance with God's will?"

To live according to God's will requires that we achieve a balance between a prayer life (our relationship with God), our relationships with others (family, coworkers, friends) and the work needed to sustain them. And so, if we spend so many hours working that our relationships and prayer life suffers, we can be sure that we are not following God's will for us. Only with such a balance will a person's way of life prepare him or her for our common Christian goal of *theosis*, partaking in the divine nature.

- Refer to the pie chart of your day (Fourth Thursday). Does your day reflect a balance between prayer, work and relationships? What might you have to change to achieve that balance?

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One: have mercy on us.



Sixth Monday

When we say the Trisagion Prayers we adore God ("Holy God… Glory be…"). We also confess to Him with a threefold admission: "All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, forgive us our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon us and heal our infirmities for Your name's sake."

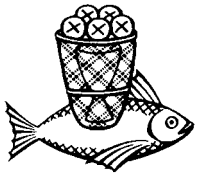
In this prayer we recognize three aspects of our broken nature, asking that God's mercy cover us despite our brokenness. We acknowledge that we commit *sins* – deliberate choices that will distance us from God' way. We tell God, in effect "I know better."

We also confess our *transgressions*, what other prayers call "involuntary" sins. Here a wrongful action results without our intending it, as when the children playing ball accidentally break a window. No one chose to break a window, but it is still broken. The child is responsible, but not guilty. And so we seek pardon, that God overlook our inadvertent transgressions.

Finally we pray for the healing of our *infirmities*. As Adam's descendants we are beset by passions, those inclinations to wrongful behavior which can dominate our lives if we do not struggle against them. Our society recognizes addiction to drugs or alcohol; the Church also knows addiction to pride, envy or spiritual laziness which we cannot fight alone. These spiritual diseases call for healing.

- People today routinely say "Sorry" without really meaning it when they have done anything which might have offended another. Discuss ways of dealings with our sins and failings more in accord with the Gospel.

Lord, forgive us our sins.



Sixth Tuesday

We know that the Lenten season is a time of fasting, but, from what? Food and drink, surely, but, more importantly, also from things that defile us. Reflect on these hymns from the Triodion to gauge the effectiveness of our fasting.

"Let us observe a Fast acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. True fasting is to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to forebear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury. If we renounce these things, then our fasting is true and pleasing to God."

"Let us keep the Fast not only by refraining from food, but by becoming strangers to all the bodily passions. Thus we who are enslaved to the tyranny of the flesh may become worthy to partake of the Lamb, the Son of God…"

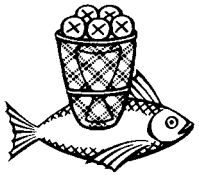
"Let us keep a spiritual Fast: let us loose every bond; let us avoid the stumbling-blocks of sin; let us forgive our brothers and sisters their trespasses, that we too may be forgiven our transgressions. Then we shall be able to cry aloud to God: 'Let our prayer come like incense before You, O Lord!'"

"While fasting with the body, brethren, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loosen every bond of iniquity. Let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence. Let us tear up all unjust agreements. Let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our homes the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God!"

"As we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit, may we persevere with love, so as to be worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great spiritual gladness to behold His holy Resurrection."

"Keeping a spiritual Fast, O brethren, let us speak no lies with our tongue or give our brothers and sisters cause for scandal. But through repentance, let us make the lamp of our soul burn brightly, and let us cry with tears to Christ: 'Forgive us our trespasses in Your love for mankind.'"

Master, pardon our transgressions.



Sixth Wednesday

The only liturgical service in our Church – and probably in any other – which has a nickname is Great Compline. In the Middle East it is popularly known as "*Ya Rab-al-quwat*" ("O Lord of Powers"), from its most beloved hymn: "O Lord of Powers, be with us."

This chant is a refrain sung after each verse of Psalm 150, which is sung in the daily services of Jews and Christians alike. It is a psalm of praise, calling us to glorify God with music and dancing, which has led some authors to call it the "Hallelujah Chorus" of the Psalms. Many people would see this as contrary to the spirit of the Great Fast, but is it? Reflect on these hymns from the Triodion to see the spirit of the Fast in our Tradition:

"Let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. Clothed in a garment of light, let us hasten to the holy third-day Resurrection that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life."

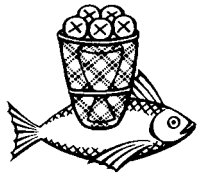
"Exult, O nations! Leap for joy, O peoples, and sing in praise to God who has given you the Cross as a strong support that cannot be shaken. For now during the season of the Fast we delight in it, keeping the feast with all our soul and understanding."

"We exalt You, O Christ, as our King and Lord; and with great rejoicing in the middle of the Fast, we embrace the Cross, which You have given us as a rampart that cannot be overthrown."

Great Compline, like the Fast itself, leads us through ascetical struggle to the joy of the presence of God.

- Discuss your experience of the Fast: has increased prayer, worship, etc. been a burden or a joy?

Holy One, look upon us and heal our infirmities for Your name's sake.



Sixth Thursday

The Great Fast urges us to increase our almsgiving, whether of time, talent or treasure. One of our "talents" which we may not think of as one, is our mobility. The fact that we can be physically mobile is a gift we really don't appreciate until it is gone.

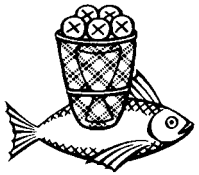
The elderly and the disabled know well what a gift it is. People with limited mobility often do not want to be dependent on others; they push themselves to do everything they can for themselves. But they – and even others who are not disabled in this way – appreciate a ride in the rain or cold. Driving others can be a most appreciated form of almsgiving to our friends and neighbors.

In a similar way many people, no longer capable to perform thorough cleaning, would welcome help around the house. No special talent is required other that the ability to graciously offer assistance and to gratefully receive the gifts your friends will offer in return. Accept everything and pass on to others what you do not need.

"In this season of repentance let us stretch out our hands in works of mercy, for nothing serves the soul as much as generosity to those in need; and almsgiving combined with fasting will deliver us from death" (Lenten Orthros).

- Reflect on your fellow-parishioners and neighbors. Are there any that would welcome rides to the grocery, the doctor, the shopping center? Do you know anyone who could use help with house cleaning, lawn work or cleaning out the garage but cannot afford to pay for it? Your priest or deacon might know if you don't.
- Brainstorm tasks with which these people might appreciate your help.
- Talk about tactful ways of offering help and receiving favors in return.

Lord, forgive us our sins.



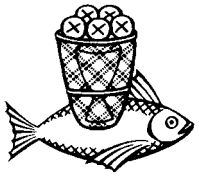
Sixth Friday

After the Lord had been with His disciples for some time and they had seen the signs and wonders that He worked and heard what He had taught them, He asked them a question, "Who do people say that I am?" The answer is found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16: "So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

Then Jesus asked them another question: "But who do *you* say that I am?" Jesus wanted to see what had they learned about Him after being with Him day and night. The Gospel tells us: "Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'"

The closer we are to Jesus the more we see Him for what He is. By reading the Gospels every day Christians get to see Jesus as the apostles saw Him. We recognize Him as the Messiah, the Savior, and the only-begotten Son of God.

- We answer the Lord's question "Who do you say that I am?" every time we say the Nicene Creed ("I believe in one God…"). Read the Creed from your prayer book and explain what it says about Jesus.
- We answer the Lord's question "Who do you say that I am?" every time we say the prayer before Communion ("I believe, Lord, and profess…"). Read this prayer and explain what it tells us about Jesus.
- We answer the Lord's question every time we say the Jesus Prayer. What does this prayer say about Jesus?
- Today ends our 40 days of the Great Fast. Now we begin the Great Week of the Lord' Passion.



Lazarus Saturday

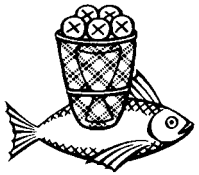
When is a Saturday not a Saturday? Today, when it is a Sunday! Lazarus Saturday commemorates how the Lord called Lazarus out of the tomb four days after his burial. In our tradition many of the prayers reserved for Sundays (like "O Son of God, who are risen from the dead…") are chanted on this day.

The Church celebrates the raising of Lazarus as anticipating Christ's resurrection and the universal resurrection on the last day, with this difference. Lazarus was returned to the life of this age; Christ would be raised to eternal life, having conquered death. It is that eternal life which will be ours at the universal resurrection.

St John's Gospel says that it was the raising of Lazarus which prompted Jesus' triumphal welcome into Jerusalem which we recall on Palm Sunday. The same troparion, connecting both events, is chanted on both days as the two celebrations are one:
"O Christ God, when You raised Lazarus from the dead before the time of Your passion, You confirmed the future resurrection of all. We too, like the children of old, carry before You the symbols of victory and cry out to You, O Conqueror of hell, 'Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

- Read the Gospel story of Lazarus (John 11:1-45).
- Decorate candles for the children in the Palm Sunday procession with ribbons and flowers. If you do not have children, give the candles to others.
- Make palm crosses for the whole family (and others) to wear on Palm Sunday.

Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!



Palm Sunday

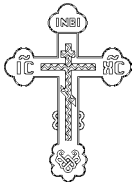
Who can resist the exuberance of children? They joined in welcoming Christ as King when the leaders of Israel rejected Him. They make today one of the most joyful feast in the Christian East. Sometimes our joy in the children makes us overlook the deeper aspects of this feast.

Jesus' followers were insignificant – mostly they were from the outlying province of Galilee: Jewish hillbillies, you might say. They were joined by people who had been impressed by the raising of Lazarus; would their support last more than a few days? But they were enough to mark this day in history as the day on which the King of the Jews took possession of His Holy City.

One of the first things the Lord did there was a prophetic action. He drove the money changers out of the temple. Why was the Lord so hard on them? Their service was necessary for the temple rites, much as candle sellers are important for our worship. They symbolized the servants of the Old Covenant, the priests and levites. The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was calling them out and they reacted by plotting His death.

- Participate in the Palm Sunday procession with the entire family.
- Take palms to any shut-in relatives, parishioners or friends you know. Offer them to any passersby as well – it might help turn their hearts to the Lord. Invite those receptive to be your guests at Holy Friday services.
- Review your parish Holy Week schedule and decide which services you will be free to attend.

Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!



Monday in Holy Week

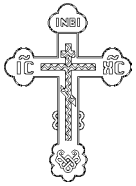
Like the Great Fast, Holy Week is a special time of prayer. There are church services that recall the events of every day of this solemn week. At orthros on Monday we remember Christ's parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Matthew 21:18-43), one of the last teachings He gave to His disciples. The fig tree had leaves on it but no fruit... it was alive, and looked just fine, but bore nothing of value.

In this story Christ is once again criticizing the Jewish leaders for being lax and unfruitful, bringing forth no spiritual fruit, despite all the labor spent on them. Christ reveals His authority, but the leaders of the temple reject Him. They were very "religious," but could not recognize the Messiah in their midst.

Confronting these leaders on their own ground, Jesus shows the truth of His teaching, "He who is not with me is against me…" (Matthew 12:30).

- Read the story of the barren fig tree (Matthew 21:18-43). Discuss your place in the story. Are you a "barren tree" (a person who looks like a good Christian on Sundays but has done nothing for the church or brought no one to Christ?
- Discuss a baseball team that has neat uniforms and the best equipment, but doesn't play by the rules. What will the league officials do? How is this like Christ's story?
- Jesus cursed the barren fig tree –pretty strong treatment! The Jewish leaders knew that Christ was condemning them. What would they do to Him in return?

Brethren, let us fear the punishment of the fig tree, withered because it was unfruitful; and let us bring worthy fruits of repentance to Christ, who grants us His great mercy.



Tuesday in Holy Week

At Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday Orthros we remember Christ's parable of the Bridegroom. For this reason we call these prayers the Bridegroom Services.

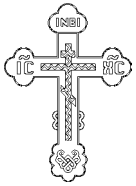
In Christ's parable, five of the Bridegroom's ten attendants were wise; they prepared their lamps for a long wait. The others were unprepared and were excluded from the wedding party. The point is clear: we should be prepared to welcome the Bridegroom (Christ) who is come to unite us to Himself. This union with the Bridegroom will take place at the cross and the tomb.

How do we prepare for this wedding? People preparing for a wedding focus on the material side of the event. When we prepare for union with Christ, however, our focus should be on inner preparation. What readies us for union with the One who emptied Himself completely for us?

Christ gives us the prescription Himself: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). Living according to the model Christ set for us is the only fitting preparation for union with Him.

- The crown is the most important marriage symbol in our Church. What is Christ's "wedding crown?" Discuss what it might tell us about Him.
- People in many countries prepare for Pascha on these days by giving their house a thorough housecleaning. Organize a family spring cleaning to prepare for the greatest celebration of our Church year.

Behold, the Bridegroom is coming in the middle of the night.



Wednesday in Holy Week

Today our Church remembers how a woman poured costly perfumed oil on Jesus' head as He ate at the house of Simon the Leper. When this was criticized as wasteful, Jesus replied, "In pouring this fragrant oil on my body she did it for my burial" (Matthew 26:12).

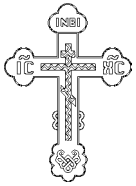
The disciples still didn't understand that the Lord was soon to be crucified; but, as the Gospel says, it was after this incident that Judas set out to betray Him.

We remember this event by another anointing, the Mystery of Holy Unction. Usually given for the physically ill, it is given to everyone today for the healing of our spiritual infirmities, to prepare us for joining the risen Christ at Pascha.

"Holy One, look upon us and heal our infirmities for Your name's sake," is a prayer frequently on our lips. It is our prayer once more as we approach for Holy Unction.

- Prepare for this mystery by reflecting on your spiritual infirmities. For which of them will you ask healing at this service?
- When God gives us His gift, we must cooperate with it. What will you do as your part in God's healing of your infirmities?
- In many places people dip cotton balls in the holy oil and use it to anoint their homes. Let each family member anoint their room or another part of the house.

For the healing of soul and body.



Thursday in Holy Week

The Gospels tells us that the Lord did two things on this day which He wanted us to continue doing in His name. First, He gave us the Eucharist saying, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:39).

In John 13:1-17 we read how, after the supper, Jesus washed His disciples' feet. In that sandal-wearing culture guests would be offered water and perhaps a household servant to wash their feet as a sign of hospitality when they entered the house.

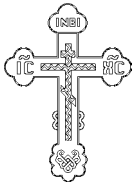
The Lord does it here to teach a lesson about humble service in love for one another. After He finished, He told the disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

In our Church the command to celebrate the Eucharist is followed every Sunday, if not daily. It is especially remembered at today's Divine Liturgy. The precept to wash the feet of your brethren is observed literally on this day by the bishop, who washes the feet of twelve priests while the Gospel story is read.

"That you should do as I have done to you" is a precept to be observed daily in any Christian relationship, especially the family. When parents serve one another and teach children to do the same, the home becomes like the Upper Room in Jerusalem where Christ gathered with His followers before sending them out into the world.

- Read John 13:1-17 at your evening meal and talk about ways of serving one another in the spirit of Christ.
- Attend your parish Holy Thursday service and discuss what was most memorable to family members.

"That you should do as I have done to you."



Friday in Holy Week

Today we remember the bitterest day in the Lord Jesus' life. He is betrayed by one disciple and the rest abandon Him. He is condemned by the Jewish leaders and handed over to the Romans. He is beaten, mocked and crucified among criminals, His body laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

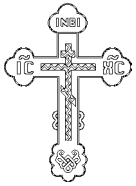
From its beginnings the Church has applied to Jesus' passion the prophecy of Isaiah, written some seven centuries before: "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief… Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed…He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:3-7).

Throughout His ministry the Lord Jesus had tasted the bitterness of not being understood by His relatives, and being rejected by those He came to save. Anyone who feels that their life is bitter should know that the Lord Jesus has walked the same way.

It is a custom in Greece, Cyprus and the Middle East for people to add vinegar to their food on this day in memory of the following incident. When the Lord, dying on the cross, said that He was thirsty, He was given sour wine, fulfilling another Old Testament prophecy: "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21).

- Prepare the simplest meal today, such as lentil soup and bread. Add vinegar to remind everyone of the sufferings of Christ.
- Attend your parish Holy Friday service and discuss what was most memorable to family members.

Glory to Your long-suffering, O Lord!



Saturday in Holy Week

In Bible movies the burial of Christ is always a dramatic scene. His body is laid in the tomb, the lid slams shut and we are in total darkness. The message is clear: everything seems over.

Our Church observes Christ's burial during the night of Holy Friday, but not with the somber character of the Bible movies. We have read the last chapter. We know that everything isn't over. And so our burial lamentations are more joyful than sorrowful as we look ahead to the resurrection.

What happened at Christ's death? We read in the Bible that "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison… to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18, 19; 4:6).

On Holy Saturday we remember that Christ was not a prisoner of Death; rather He entered the realm of Death to proclaim the Gospel and conquer Death.

Holy Saturday is the only Saturday during the year on which we are called to fast, remembering Christ's stay in the tomb. We will end our fasting with the celebration of Pascha.

- Discuss your family's experience of fasting during the past season. What did you learn from your prayer, fasting and almsgiving?
- Prepare your Paschal celebration by coloring eggs and preparing Paschal foods. It's almost time for the feast!

"In the tomb with Your body and in Hades with Your soul"

Holy Pascha

"Christ is risen!" – This cry is heard over and over in Eastern Churches throughout the world today. It is the "Feast of Feasts," the "Season of Seasons." Pascha is the most important festival in the Church year because it is the feast that says, "Christ is alive – He is there for you today!" As St Paul says, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Cor15:17).

The effect of Christ's resurrection is dramatized in our Church by the *hajme* service before the Paschal Liturgy. The priest knocks on the church doors, saying repeatedly: "Be lifted up, O eternal gates, and the King of Glory shall enter in!" The doors are opened and we enter, following him into the brightly adorned church.

The risen Christ has entered into heavenly glory with His human nature (and, therefore, with ours). We have access through Him to that communion with God which was lost in the beginning. We are on a journey meant to lead us to Theosis, when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

This radiant festival is observed by feasting instead of fasting. We especially enjoy those foods not eaten during the Great Fast: meat (especially the Paschal lamb), dairy (especially Easter eggs), buttery sweets and the like. Invite guests to join in the feast today. Visit family members or bring shut-ins some holiday treats. "Indeed He is risen!"

The celebration of Pascha continues throughout the coming week.es in Make it the "Bright Week" it is in our Church by serving holiday fare daily. Have an Easter egg each day and exchange the Paschal greeting. Some people visit the graves of their loved ones this week – the cemetery too rejoices in the resurrection of Christ.

"Christ is risen! – Indeed He is risen!"

Monday in Bright Week

Every day this week our Church's services take on the character of Pascha. The usual psalms and hymns are replaced by resurrection hymns. Each day this week we will reflect on one of them and add it to our evening prayer.

Repeated several times in each service is the *troparion*: "**Christ is risen from the dead, and by His death He has trampled upon Death and has given life to those who were in the tombs.**" It raises two questions for you to think about and discuss.

What does it mean that Christ "has trampled upon Death?" To trample is to crush underfoot, to completely defeat. Let little ones stamp their feet when singing these words and they will quickly understand their meaning. You may want to remind them that trampling sin and death is ok; trampling one another is not!

What is "Death?" Not the fact of physical death but the power of Death to keep us eternally captive. Christ did not eliminate death, but robbed it of its power. It can no longer enslave the person who believes in eternal life with Christ.

- Let family members help one another to memorize the Paschal troparion.
- Chant or say this troparion at the start of your family prayers. Let one of the younger children hold a lighted candle during prayers this week.
- Then exchange the Paschal greeting and have an Easter egg or another treat!

"Christ is risen! – Indeed He is risen!"

Tuesday in Bright Week

Today's prayer is called a *hypakoe*, or responsorial hymn. It is based on the Gospel story of the myrrh-bearing women who came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus:

Mary and her companions went forth before dawn. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb and heard the angel say, "Why do you seek Him as a man among the dead when He is in eternal splendor? Behold, the shroud is laid aside. Hasten and proclaim to the world that the Lord is risen and has put Death to death, for He is the Son of God, the Savior of mankind."

Discuss "the shroud" mentioned in this hymn. In most countries even today a dead person is wrapped in a shroud for burial: a long sheet of cloth that covers them completely. In the Middle East Christians often use shrouds imprinted with an icon of the burial of Christ.

- Read Mark 16:1-8 or Luke 24:1-8 for the evangelists' accounts of this event.
- Repeat this hymn several times for comprehension. If the words are too difficult let younger members repeat as a refrain after each line, "Behold, the shroud is laid aside."
- Chant or say the troparion "Christ is risen" as well as the hypakoe at the start of your family prayers. Let one of the younger children hold a lighted candle during prayers this week.
- Then exchange the Paschal greeting and have an Easter egg or another treat!

"Christ is risen! – Indeed He is risen!"

Wednesday in Bright Week

Today our prayer is the kontakion of Pascha, which we will be hearing often during the next forty days. Our Paschal season extends beyond Bright Week to the feast of the Ascension of the Lord, forty days after Pascha.

The kondakion reads: "**Though You went down in the tomb, O Immortal One, You overthrew the power of Hades and rose victorious, O Christ God. You greeted the ointment-bearing women, saying 'Rejoice!' You gave peace to Your apostles and to those who had fallen, resurrection!**"

Five separate events are mentioned in this hymn:
1 – The Lord's burial ("Though You went down in the tomb..."). This is described in Matthew 27:57-61.
2 – His victory over Death ("You overthrew the power…"). This was seen by no human eye and cannot be described. It is represented symbolically in the resurrection icon.
3 – His greeting the women. Find this in Matthew 28:8, 9.
4 – Read how the Lord gave peace to His apostles in John 20:19-30.
5 – As we say in the creed, we are waiting "for the resurrection of the dead (the fallen) and the life of the world to come."

- Read the Scripture passages, then repeat this hymn several times for comprehension.
- Chant or say the troparion "Christ is risen" as well as the hypakoe and the kontakion at the start of your family prayers. Let one of the younger children hold a lighted candle during prayers this week.
- Then exchange the Paschal greeting and have an Easter egg or another treat!

"Christ is risen! – Indeed He is risen!"

Thursday in Bright Week

Being God You were present in the tomb by Your body and yet in Hades by Your soul, in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne, O Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, filling all things but encompassed by none.

Friday in Bright Week

O Christ, Your tomb – the fount of our resurrection – is indeed a giver of life more splendid than Paradise and more radiant than any royal chamber.

Saturday in Bright Week

Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord has shone upon you. Rejoice and be glad, O Sion. And you, O pure one, O Theotokos, exult in the resurrection of your Son.